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# FIRE DISCIPLINE: ITS FOUNDATION AND APPLICATION.

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BY

LIEUT. STEWART MURRAY.

*1st Batt. Gordon Highlanders.*

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“The main object it aims at is to obtain, at the decisive moment, the greatest development of Infantry fire under the most careful supervision and control.”—*Army Order, 1st June, 1893.*

## P R E F A C E .

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Having been now for five years much interested in the study of Fire Discipline, having slowly struggled through the several successive stages of thought on the subject, and having at length reached some settled conclusions, it may not be amiss to try to supply a want which I myself have often felt, the want, namely, of "a body of doctrine," clearly setting forth the ground principles of Fire Discipline. It may be objected by some, that the definition given of Fire Discipline does not include much that has hitherto been considered as belonging to Fire Discipline. But the contention which this book is meant to uphold is, that so long as the Fire Units can be kept distinct, good Fire Tactics and obedience are all that is necessary, and that the real Fire Discipline becomes necessary only, when the Fire Units can no longer be kept distinct. I have to beg the indulgence of the reader, for the frequent repetition of well-known facts and truths contained in the following pages. If, however, he has patience to read on to the end, the object of these repetitions will be seen. The cardinal points of Fire Discipline are indeed few and simple; but these cardinal points cannot be too often repeated and insisted on, for only by such constant repetition and insistence, can they be strongly impressed on the mind of every single individual soldier without exception, which is necessary. It is necessary because the bottom of the whole matter is, that each soldier must be so thoroughly trained that, in the close fire-fight, if no leaders are left in his vicinity, he can still quietly "fight on by himself."

Finally, the object of this book is to clearly draw the distinction between Discipline and Fire Discipline. Until this distinction is clearly drawn, neither can be properly taught. The claims of their respective upholders and teachers will pull different ways, and prove mutually destructive, with the result that the soldier will not be properly trained for Battle.

STEWART MURRAY, *Lieut.*,  
1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders.



## CHAPTER I.

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### THE CAUSES.

The idea of Fire Discipline is derived from the occurrences of the Franco-German War of 1870, the first war in which breech-loaders were pitted against breech-loaders. With what happened in 1870 we are all supposed to be familiar ; the Infantry Drill, therefore, in defining Fire Discipline, does not enter into the causes or principles thereof, but merely enjoins its practice, defines it, and tells us what results it is expected to achieve (*see* 124 13).

Any attempt within the limited space of the Infantry Drill, to describe the causes of Fire Discipline, or the confusion manifest in 1870 which it is hoped thereby to overcome, would of course be impossible. Many, however, not realizing that the Infantry Drill must expect the requisite data for the study of Fire Discipline to be sought elsewhere, attempt to start from the definitions and statements of expected results, and, being without sufficient data, are naturally led to false conclusions.

It is impossible to study any subject thoroughly, or to arrive at true conclusions thereon, without a knowledge of its causes and ground principles ; the causes and ground principles of Fire Discipline must therefore be sought for,—and sought for outside the Infantry Drill.

The first thing to do in order to get to the beginning and bottom of the matter as much as possible, is to read the detailed official account of the battles of 1870, not merely so as to grasp the leading features of these battles, but from an infantry point of view, following the fortunes of regiments of battalions, and, where possible, of companies. If time cannot be spared to read all the battles thus, some of them at least should be read, such as the battles of Wörth, Spicheren, Colombey-Nouilly, Vionville-Mars-la-Tour and Gravelotte. Thus an idea can be gained, which cannot be gained in any other way, of the conditions of a modern battle.

We there see that the usual course of most of the German attacks seems to have been much as follows :—

The first advance usually failed to get within assaulting distance of the main position, but was brought to a standstill at a distance of several hundred paces. It then had to resist a counter-attack, and perhaps had to give ground at first, but, instead of retreating far, we find the various companies firmly establishing themselves wherever a

good fire position presented itself, and from thence stopping the advance of the counter-attack. When reinforcements of another battalion or regiment arrived, the advance would be resumed. After advancing some distance it would again be brought to a standstill by the arrival of strong reinforcements for the enemy, and the consequent greatly increased strength of his fire. The company leaders, however, not giving way, would occupy the best fire positions they could find, and thence repelling the counter-attacks of the enemy, maintain the ground they had gained. A long, almost stationary, fire fight might now follow, lasting sometimes for hours, marked by alternate attacks and counter-attacks, and fluctuating backwards and forwards as reinforcements came up on either side; during which the company leaders frequently had to take the most prompt and important action on their own judgments. Eventually the arrival of fresh reinforcements would enable the advance to be carried nearer to the enemy, and, after a hot struggle, the whole mass of skirmishers, consisting often of companies of various battalions, regiments, and even brigades mingled together, would be picked up and led forward to the assault by such of the senior officers as remained.

We thus get a clear idea that the attack, on a modern battle field against breech loaders, is a widely different thing from the attack as practised

on a parade ground or even on a field day over the roughest ground. We shall thus be safe from one fruitful source of error ; a source from which perhaps more errors have sprung than from any other.

In order to try and look at the matter from the eyes of those who took part in these infantry fights, the experiences and deductions therefrom of V. Bogoslawski, as a company officer who "struggled for days in the bloody *melée*," should be read. He there tells us of the inestimable value of strict discipline in the advance, how "when a shell burst in the midst of a German battalion, it closed its ranks again and every soldier advanced *instinctively* obeying the voice of his leader." He describes how, later on, this discipline becomes relaxed, because "the noise of a close conflict between breech loader and breech loader so deadens the sound of the human voice that a great part of the men cannot hear the word of command, and the officer can only influence by his conduct and example." Also how "this advance would occasion separate strokes and counter-strokes, which naturally caused the battle to roll backwards and forwards. At this period the fight would attain its highest intensity. The fire of the breech loader on both sides resounded incessantly, and the work of commanding became more and more difficult." He tell us how "this undue precipitation, this disorderly forward move-

ment, and in like manner, this equally momentary disorderly retreat, repeated themselves frequently. At such moments a bugle sound, or a good hearty cheer from someone or other, produced the best effect. At such moments as these the officer would sacrifice himself to set a good example, hence arose the great loss in officers." He attributes the "surging backwards and forwards of the mass of skirmishers on both sides, such as the world probably never saw before on a battle field" to "the surprise and sudden shock produced by the fire of the breech loader. For instance if a detachment succeeds in flanking the enemy, the sudden rapid file fire produces such a powerful effect, that often the instinct of self-preservation affects the mass, and a rapid retreat takes place." He tells us how the great swarms of skirmishers became necessarily mingled pell-mell.

"If fresh troops come up from the rear during a stationary musketry fight, whether to strengthen the line of skirmishers or to make an attack, *it was necessary to double them up with the old skirmishers, because closing to a flank was usually not to be thought of.* Thus men of many battalions and regiments (British brigades) were intermingled."

Out of the many infantry lessons to be learned from this studying the fighting of 1870, a few points stand out clear, as regards our subject of Fire Discipline.



We see that after deployment an advance follows, as far as possible and as fast as possible, till stopped by fire so heavy, and losses so great, as to render any further advance as yet impossible. Such an advance as, at the first lead off, secured the crest of the Gifert-wald, or the Colombey heights, or the Bois de Genivaux, &c.

We see that in this first advance a point is usually reached beyond which it is impossible for a long time to gain any further ground, owing to the enormous losses which any such attempt entails. Here a long infantry fight takes place, marked by alternate attacks and counter-attacks, and fluctuating backwards and forwards as reinforcements come up to either side.

This fire fight may last for hours, and our troops must be so trained that their *morale* and discipline can stand out against this long continued ordeal of fire. We must be able to offer such a resistance to the attempts of the enemy to drive us from the ground we have gained, as enabled the German companies in first line to maintain their hold on the Stiring copse and forest, on the Rotherberg, on the Western slopes of the Colombey brook, on the Bois de Genivaux, on the Tronville copse, &c. : such a resistance as was offered by the 24th Regiment at Vionville, or the 33rd Regiment at Gravelotte.

These two chief features of the first advance are described in the Infantry Drill 1893 (*See* 124-4).

"The duties of the firing line are to push forward as near the enemy's position as possible, and to keep up a well-directed fire upon it from the moment such fire becomes effective."

"When about 500 yards from the position, more or less, according to the nature of the ground, the firing line endeavours to establish itself in good defensive positions, all along the front, from whence, as from a first parallel in a siege, both false and real attacks can be made upon the position in front."

One thing, however, the Infantry Drill does not tell us, but leaves us to infer from our knowledge of the infantry fighting of 1870. It is, that along this "first parallel" will gradually gather, as reinforcements come up from the rear, a pell-mell fighting line, sections, companies, and even battalions intermingled. This pell-mell firing line must be one of the characteristic features of the next war, as it was of the infantry fighting of 1870. It must be, because often there will be no room to bring reinforcements up on the flanks, especially opposite the important points selected for assault. Also, even if there be room on a flank, there may be no cover there, while the firing-line is under cover; it will then be best to double them up with the old firing-line. Again cover, if

only cover from view, is, with smokeless powder and magazine rifles, growing more and more important; it is, therefore, more than ever necessary to bring the supports up under cover, and if only one covered approach exists, they must be brought up by that one approach, successively extend, and mingle with the firing line, "for closing to a flank was not usually to be thought of."

We therefore clearly see that in this "first parallel" our firing-line will gradually become a line of fire-units mixed up pell-mell. This being the case, the task of our Fire-Discipline is to devise a method of restoring order into the chaos into which we clearly see that our first advance will resolve itself, a chaos in which it must not be allowed to remain.

This is the principal lesson, so far as our subject of Fire Discipline is concerned, to be derived from the infantry fighting of 1870. Those who do not study these infantry fights will never properly learn this lesson; they will attempt to get over its difficulties by ignoring their existence. But a failure to thoroughly grasp this great lesson will utterly vitiate any conclusion formed, as on this fact rests the whole of Fire Discipline.

Another point which stands out in great prominence in the 1870 battles is the tremendous amount of straggling and skulking under cover, which takes place during an advance against the

breechloader. Those who wish to understand what "losses by cover" mean, should read "A Summer Night Dream," with its revelations of 1870. To prevent this in the future is one of the duties of Fire Discipline. Though smokeless powder will render it easier to prevent than it was in 1870, as we have now got all our men well under our eyes, yet it will probably be impossible to prevent it wholly. These stragglers and skulkers, however, can, and must be collected again, and everywhere formed into supports, such as the German supports in the Niederwald, etc.

We have now got to the foundation, and can clearly see with what we have to deal. The province of Fire Discipline, as an addition to ordinary discipline, is this—A firing line, when under the stress of circumstances and of ground, it is resolved into its elements, sections, companies and battalions mingled pell-mell; when the fire of the breech-loader on both sides, resounding incessantly, so drowns the sound of the voice that only a few men in the immediate neighbourhood can possibly hear any word of command; when leaders are scarce, owing to the disproportionate losses among officers and non-commissioned officers, who, at this period, when the mass is struck and astounded by the terrible fire, must often sacrifice themselves to set a good example; when, if order is not promptly restored, a wild rolling inefficient

fire will spring up, some men firing furiously from the rage of battle, others merely loosing off into the blue to shoot up their courage by making a noise, and, ammunition beginning to fail, the mingled mass of skirmishers will be driven back.

Such is *the material* with which we have to deal,—a firing-line resolved into its elements.

*The task of Fire Discipline* is to promptly reduce this pell-mell to order: into ordered commands again, so that there may be no confusion, or as little as possible, and no wild, high, inefficient firing, but that the whole shall fight steadily on, and ready for all eventualities.

As, however, the soldier at such moments, cannot grasp new ideas, but can only act on impulse or instinct, as he has been accustomed, we must therefore train him during peace to fight in a Fire Disciplined pell-mell: as soon as the units are mixed up, to invariably fall into new commands; and in case there are no leaders left near enough for him to hear their voice, each individual soldier must know exactly what he has to do, so that he may do it instinctively in the pell-mell firing-line, “fighting on by himself.”

*Order in the pell-mell firing-line engrained into the soldiers' blood*,—this is Fire Discipline.

## CHAPTER II.

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### BUILDING UP, OR PREPARATORY TRAINING.

#### I.—DISCIPLINE.

Discipline is *the long continued habit by which the very muscles of a soldier instinctively obey the word of command.*

In battle the value of this habit is inestimable,—all enduring and all conquering.

This habit can only be learnt by strict close order drill on the parade ground. Strict close order drill on the parade ground is, therefore, a necessary foundation for Fire Discipline. What we require in Fire Discipline is,—that under whatsoever stress of circumstances, danger and death, the soldier hears the word of command, his muscles, if not his mind, shall *instinctively* obey it.

The first step in the building up of Fire Discipline is therefore the strictest barrack square discipline, so that the muscles of the soldier may learn to instinctively obey the word of command.

The muscles which can be thus trained on the barrack square are those of the neck, arms, legs and feet; or in other words, the muscles which perform the motions of holding the head erect, of handling the rifle, of marching, and of turning. The greater the smartness insisted on in performing these motions, the greater will be the habit of instant and instinctive obedience acquired by the muscles.

For purposes of Fire Discipline, therefore, it is absolutely necessary that *every single individual soldier without exception* (every possible atom of the pell-mell firing line) shall be thoroughly taught to hold himself, to handle his arms, to march, and to turn, in exact accordance with the book and with the greatest smartness, always and everywhere. Any carelessness in performing these motions should be instantly and always checked, as it shows that the muscles have not yet acquired the habit of instant instinctive obedience,—that they are not yet sufficiently disciplined. Any such carelessness allowed in peace will bear most injurious fruit in battle, when we require of the muscles, an instant, absolute and instinctive obedience to the word of command.

The close order drill of the soldier generally is, of course, important, as it still further impresses on his mind the habit of discipline, and also mutual confidence in the power of the mass to do whatever it is ordered to do; and it is further necessary

for the arrival and orderly deployment of masses of troops on the battle field.

But for purposes of Fire Discipline, the chief thing is, that *the soldiers' very muscles be trained to instinctive obedience*, and that therefore the greatest possible smartness in marching, in turning, and in the handling of arms, be insisted on everywhere and always on the part of every individual soldier without exception.

It is this habit of instinctive obedience on the part of every individual soldier in the pell-mell firing line, which we rely upon as the great means of preserving Fire Discipline.

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## II.—DISCIPLINE IN THE FIELD.

For purposes of Fire Discipline, it is necessary that, while the muscles of the soldier are being trained to instinctive obedience on the barrack square, he should *simultaneously* be taken out into the country and taught the elements of work in the field, equal strictness and attention being there given to the instant smartness of all his motions.

It would be well if he were sometimes marched out into the field, and there put through his squad drill and manual exercise, so that he may



thoroughly grasp that, as regards the instantaneous obedience demanded of his muscles (*i.e.* discipline), there is absolutely no difference between the field and the barrack square.

If this idea is not thoroughly impressed upon him at the beginning of his training, it is most difficult to impress it upon him later. When taken out into the field later, the soldier is apt to imagine that a relaxation of discipline is permitted, and that even when at attention the same smartness and instant obedience is not required. If this spirit is allowed to creep in, then the greater part of the benefit derived from the barrack square drill is, so far as Fire-Discipline is concerned, nullified. It must be remembered that the pell-mell firing line will make greater demands upon the soldiers' habit of instinctive obedience than have ever been made before; our system of training in the field must therefore foster this habit more carefully, more constantly and more strictly, than has ever been done before.

The soldier must be made to thoroughly understand that in the field his motions must be as smart as on the parade-ground; and closed bodies when not under fire, should where possible be sometimes called to "attention," and the same smartness in handling of arms, marching and turning exacted, as if marching past on the parade-ground.

The soldier is only taught smart and instantaneous obedience on the barrack-square, in order that—he may bear it with him into the field.

If this system of training be insisted on and carried out in the field, then we may hope that in the pell-mell firing-line every individual soldier will instantly, instinctively obey any word of command he hears.

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### III.—MUSKETRY.

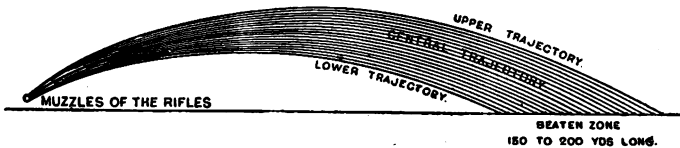
For purposes of Fire Discipline, as regards the musketry training it is chiefly important that every individual soldier without exception should be able to hit at the shorter ranges, 500 yards and under; in order that in the pell-mell firing-line he may have full confidence in himself and his rifle, and that, even if there are no leaders left close enough for him to hear their voice and obey their orders, he may still shoot on quietly with confidence and judgment. To this end, therefore, the individual musketry instruction must above all things tend, to the thorough *confidence of each soldier in his ability to hit at the short ranges*. It is there that the decision is arrived at, and it is there only that the soldier may sometimes find himself leaderless and forced to rely on his own judgment alone.

As regards the further ranges beyond the "fixed sight," it is not quite so important that every soldier should be a good shot, for there will always be plenty of leaders to "control" the fire, and see that it is all directed upon one spot. Individual errors indeed are here useful, for by forming the cone of fire and the beaten zone, they compensate for any mistake of the leader in judging the range, and ensure that some part of the cone of fire will fall upon the enemy.

The theory of the cone of fire and the beaten zone should be thoroughly impressed upon every soldier. He must understand that the cone of fire of a volley is like the jet of water from a fire hose, which springing from the collected muzzles of the rifles, as from the mouth of the hose, gradually opens out as individual errors begin to tell, and finally descends upon the ground, as the jet of water does, covering a large area. This area upon which the cone of fire descends he must understand is the beaten zone, its area being roughly from 150 to 200 yards in length and its breadth roughly equal to twice the number of yards that there are hundreds in the range (at 700 yards beaten zone = 200 yards in depth, 14 yards roughly in breadth). He must then be taught that the principle of collective fire is, that the soldiers form this cone of fire (this jet of fire), which the officer turns now upon one target, now upon another (as

a fireman turns a hose). That what he has to do therefore at the further ranges is to help to form a good cone of fire, which his officer will direct so as to include the enemy within its beaten zone. In order that he may do this it is above all things necessary that he properly adjusts his sight, for otherwise his bullet will not form part of the collective cone of fire. In collective fire this is his chief duty, to adjust his sight exactly to the direction given, so that the cone of fire may be a good one.

#### THE CONE OF FIRE.



It must be explained that if only the sights are properly adjusted, every man's bullet is useful, for if the officer has given the exact range the central trajectories (good shots) will hit the enemy, if he has slightly under-estimated it, the upper trajectories (men who fired too high) will hit, if he over-estimated it, then the lower trajectories (men who aimed too low) will hit. It is necessary to fully explain thus to the soldier the advantages of collective fire, so that in the pell-mell he may readily put himself into new fire units, in order to obtain these advantages.

The soldier must of course thoroughly understand what is meant by the "direction," "control" and "execution" of the fire. That the captain alone "*directs*" the fire, when it is to open, at what target, at what range, what kind of fire, when it is to cease, etc. That the half-company, section and subsection leaders "*control*" the fire, see that the named sight is used (said to be a most important duty in action and demanding constant vigilance) that the named object is aimed at, the aim carefully taken, that there is no wild high firing, that there is no skulking or lagging behind, or attempting to carry wounded to the rear, etc., but that everybody advances *instantly* on the word of command. He must thoroughly understand that this "control" in battle will be no mere word, but of iron strictness, and that obedience to orders will be enforced, if necessary, by the weapons of the leaders. As regards his own duty, the "execution" of the fire, he has to form part of the cone of fire directed on the target by his captain; he must carefully adjust his sight, and not forget, in the excitement of battle, to alter it when a new distance is given (this appears to be a common error, *vide* French rifles found after Wörth, sighted up to 800 yards though they had been fighting at the close ranges); that he must aim carefully and not forget, when possible, to get a rest for his rifle; that he must on no

account ever use his magazine without orders : that he must cease fire at once whenever he hears the whistle sound ; that he must lose no opportunity of refilling his pouches from those of dead or wounded comrades, etc., also that he must on no account ever lag behind, or attempt to carry wounded comrades out of action, but must advance instantly on the word of command no matter how hot the fire may be.

These matters are of course well known by most of the soldiers, but the great thing is, for purposes of Fire Discipline, that *every single individual soldier without exception* shall know them thoroughly, and be questioned again and again to see that he does. He must especially be made to understand that the "control" will be no mere word, but of iron strictness, that every soldier must support it and *force* any cowards to advance with his comrades.

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#### IV.—THE BAYONET.

In order that the individual soldier in the pell-mell firing line, with no leader left in his vicinity whose encouraging voice he can hear, or who can tell him what to do, may still have confidence to fight quietly on by himself, and stubbornly resist

a counter-attack, it is necessary that he should have full confidence in his power to effectively use his bayonet.

The days of the bayonet are apparently by no means over in European war. In a close country, where closed bodies of troops can be brought up near the firing line, many a fight may still be decided by the bayonet. Even in the open country towards the end of a long fight, when fighting energy of the exhausted firing lines has nearly evaporated, when leaders are scarce, and ammunition possibly beginning to fail, when fire discipline has grown weaker and men are beginning to loose off into the blue,—then will come the time for a bayonet stroke delivered by closed bodies brought up in rear, either in attack or in counter-attack.

In order therefore that the individual soldier in the pell-mell firing line may have confidence to stubbornly resist such a counter attack, or in order that he may retain the offensive desire to get to close quarters with the enemy whenever an opportunity offers itself,—it is necessary that he have full trust in his bayonet. Such confidence can only come from a knowledge of his ability to use it practically, in other words—from plenty of previous loose play. No amount of bayonet and review exercise will give this practical confidence,—it can only come from loose play.

Such being the case, from the point of view of Fire Discipline, it is necessary that each individual soldier without exception should be taught to trust his bayonet by plenty of loose play. In every company there should be a few old rifles with nothing but the wood work left, and a rusty old bayonet attached, with a great wad at the end ; also a few cheap jackets of stuffed canvas, a few masks, and a few left hand gloves. Every day a few of the men should be set to work with these at loose play, superintended by a non-commissioned officer ; so that each man in the company could have his turn pretty often.

Some such system as this is necessary, from the point of view of Fire Discipline, to give every individual soldier in the pell-mell that confidence in his bayonet which is necessary to enable him to fight quietly on, even though no leader is near, and he is threatened with a counter-attack.

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#### V.—THE ATTACK.

Taking the definition of Fire Discipline given before in chapter I, as "*order in the pell-mell firing-line engrained into the soldiers' blood*, the advance whilst fire-units can still be kept distinct, scarcely comes within its province. For this advance the ordinary battle discipline, that is to



say, the discipline of the barrack square and its habits of instantaneous obedience transplanted on to the battlefield, should suffice. The advance of course will be practised in any formation the commanding officer may order, the fire-units will be kept distinct, the "direction," "control" and "execution" of the fire carefully attended to. The soldier will therefore now be practised in that collective fire and "control" which he has already been taught theoretically.

There is one other thing which, from the point of view of future Fire-Discipline in the pell-mell should never be forgotten at this stage. It is the importance of the company commander, after having received his own instructions, clearly explaining to his men what they have got to do, and how it is proposed to carry it out. For it is necessary, when the soldier arrives in the pell-mell, that he should thoroughly understand why he is there and what he has got to do; so that if no leader is left near him, he may still bide his time, fight quietly on, and eventually help to do it. It should not be explained in a conversational tone, but as if it were of the greatest importance, in as decisive and emphatic a tone as if it was to be done under fire. Then the soldier will attend. The more a man's fighting intelligence is thus trained, the better will he fight in the pell-mell when, perhaps, no leaders being left in

his vicinity, he has to fight on "by himself." A constant and consistent effort should therefore be made to develop the fighting-intelligence of every individual soldier. Whenever the attack is practised, at all exercises in the field, what he has got to do should be carefully explained to him; on the conclusion of the exercise he should be questioned as to the way it was carried out and as to the part which he himself played and how he carried out what he had to do. If he is dull and does not understand, it should be again explained, and he should be again questioned to see that it has not gone in at one ear and out at the other. So can the soldier at this stage be best prepared for the time when he may have to fight on leaderless, "by himself."

The training which prepares the troops for Fire Discipline will also help to carry them forward in the advance, forward through the hostile fire, often perhaps without being permitted to reply. For instance, if a body of troops be suddenly struck by artillery, if their muscles have been previously thoroughly trained to instinctive obedience to any order, the electric influence of a sudden command might probably produce the best effect, by giving them at once something else to do and think of, such as "attention, parade step," or "shoulder arms," or "slope arms." When fire has opened the strictest "control" will be necessary, to guide

the fire, husband the ammunition and see that none remain behind under cover. This "control" is akin to Fire Discipline, though Fire Discipline in its simplest form, and for its smooth working demands the same training. It has already been described, and at this stage of his training for Fire Discipline the soldier will become thoroughly habituated to it in practice.

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## CHAPTER III.

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### APPLICATION.

#### THE PELL MELL.

This is the subject of Fire Discipline, the training of the individual, so that "*Order in the Pell-Mell firing line may be engrained into the soldiers' blood:*" Order in the great mixed swarms of skirmishers, which are such a characteristic feature of breech loading battles; Order when the surrounding din of rapid fire from both sides so drowns the sound of the human voice that none but those in the immediate vicinity can hear any word of command. Order, when, into this pell-mell, rush fresh reinforcements from behind, and make the confusion worse! Order although, as the fire increases in intensity, leaders become scarce; Order, even in those parts of the line where the influence of the remaining leaders can no longer make itself felt. To achieve this order is the task of Fire Discipline.

It appears at first sight impossible, but if we look a little more closely into the matter, we shall

see that order, or at least comparative order, is by no means so hopeless a task as it looks.

For under some such system of preparatory training as that shown in the foregoing pages, the soldier will not enter the pell-mell unprepared. He will have already learnt most of the things which are necessary, and, in practising the pell-mell, it only remains to teach him one or two more, to make order, or comparative order, an attainable possibility.

First as to what he will have already learnt.

- (1). The muscles of his body, and, through them, his mind will have acquired the habit of instant instinctive obedience to the word of command on the barrack square.
- (2). In the field *from the beginning of his training* a similar instant obedience has been insisted on, and will have become equally instinctive. He will therefore in the pell-mell be amenable to the word of command, for if his mind be too astounded to attend, his muscles will obey.
- (3). He will have acquired a quiet confidence in his ability to hit the enemy at this short range. He will also understand the need of forming himself into part of a new fire unit in order to get the advantage of collective fire.

- (4). He will have acquired confidence in himself and his bayonet to do for the enemy if he can get at him, so will not fear the enemy making a counter-attack, *i.e.*, coming forward to be bayoneted.
- (5). He will have already learnt to subordinate his fire practically to "control," to aim it at any ordered target and to cease fire at once on hearing the whistle sound or a command. His fighting intelligence has been developed, and he knows why he is there and what he has got to do.

These five great fighting qualities, if thoroughly instilled into *every individual soldier without exception*, will go far towards making him amenable to order in the pell-mell.

In practising Fire Discipline, therefore, it only remains to teach him three more.

- (1). The habit of instinctively falling into new commands out of the pell-mell.
- (2). Controlled mass fire.
- (3). The habit, when leaders grow scarce, of quietly "fighting on by himself."

# 1.—THE HABIT OF INSTINCTIVELY FALLING INTO NEW COMMANDS OUT OF THE PELL-MELL.

It is of course impossible to suppose that the soldier will be able to fall into new commands in the pell-mell of battle, if he has not been accustomed to do so beforehand. For it appears to be generally acknowledged that, in the maddening din and confusion of the close fire fight, he can only act on impulse, on instinct, as he has been accustomed to do in peace or war. We must therefore in peace assiduously practice him in the pell-mell, and in at once falling into new commands out of it ; practise him till he does it instantly without any confusion or delay ; practise him till it becomes a habit into which he naturally falls. Otherwise we may not hope to reduce the pell-mell of battle to order. What such a pell-mell, unreduced to order, will mean, it needs little imagination to conceive. For the purpose of Fire Discipline therefore it is absolutely necessary to practise the pell-mell, and to practise it constantly.

The method of practising the pell-mell is as follows :—

As soon as the companies, sections and sub-sections are mixed up, each captain calls out “ My command extends from this path (this rock, this hedge, this ditch, or any available object) to that tree,” or “ my command extends from sergeant so-and-so to sergeant so-and-so,” or making the

men at each end of his new company hold their rifles up in the air "My command extends from this rifle to that rifle." In the same way the lieutenants form new half companies. The section and sub-section leaders form new units by calling out "My section (or sub-section) extends from private this to private that," or making the men at each end hold their rifles in the air, "My section (or sub-section) extends from this rifle to that rifle." If only one battalion is mixed up, probably the quickest way to do it would be by shouting out names; if more than one battalion is mixed up, and the names not known, then the uplifted rifles is an equally easy way, or in a broken country from object to object.

In this manner, however great the mixture, new commands can be at once formed. Only to do it instantly, naturally, and instinctively, it must be practised till all ranks are thereto thoroughly habituated, or a clashing of commands will follow.

In company exercises it can be practised by extending one section widely, and then piling the other sections one after the other on top of it. Non-commissioned officers to at once form new sections and sub-sections; these new commands can be then proved, by forming column of sections or sub-sections.

In battalion exercises it can be practised by extending two or three companies in the firing



line, then sending up successive companies to reinforce and mingle with the firing line; new companies, sections and sub-sections to be at once formed. The battalion could then be proved by the new companies all along the line being ordered to form company columns of sections or sub-sections.

The original companies would then be re-assembled.

The greatest smartness and quickness in falling into his new unit to be insisted on as regards every individual soldier; every soldier to thoroughly understand the reason of the pell-mell, and the reason of promptly forming new units out of it; carelessness or slowness in obeying the orders of his new leader to be never passed over; for, if he says that he did not know that he belonged to sergeant so and so's new section (it being his chief business in the pell-mell to know his leader), not knowing his leader is no palliation but rather an aggravation of his offence.

In the field the pell-mell can also frequently be practised; sometimes the whole battalion mixed up, sometimes only part. But it should be practised, and practised till it has become as natural a formation for the men to fight in as any other, till *order in the pell-mell engrained into the soldiers' blood* has become second nature.

By such means only can the great mixed swarms of skirmishers characteristic of breech loading battles be reduced to order; by such means only can the

orders of higher command make themselves felt ; by such means only can the colonel of a battalion, on accompanying his last company into the pell-mell, find there, not confusion where command cannot be exercised, but a line of companies and fire units, each under its leader, ready to carry out in an orderly manner a further attack, or any command he may give these leaders.

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## 2.—CONTROLLED MASS FIRE.

Whether volleys will or will not be possible at the further ranges against breech loaders, there can be no doubt that they will not be possible in the pell-mell. At the same time we cannot allow the soldier to break into rapid independent fire on his own account, or all control would be lost, and his last cartridge would soon be fired away. The alternative is "controlled mass fire," that is,—the target, sight, and rate of fire, are ordered ; the soldier then continues to fire at the same target, at the same rate, till he hears the whistle sound, and then instantly ceases fire, till a new target, or a new rate of fire is ordered.

The rates of fire are three : (1). "Slow" when no two men of a file may have their rifles up at the present together, but one must observe whilst the other fires ; (2). "Rapid" when both men of

a file may fire when they please ; (3). Magazine. To facilitate the maintenance of these three rates of fire, as soon as a new section or sub-section is formed in the pell-mell the men must at once form themselves into files from the right (calling out "one two, one two, one two"). Each soldier must understand that in battle, if his comrade is shot, he must at once attach himself to the next man so as to be able to maintain a proper "slow" rate of fire.

By this means the company commander, communicating his orders to the section and sub-section leaders, can turn the fire of the pell-mell almost at once on to any target. A silence being produced by the whistle, or comparative silence, the sub-section leaders could make their commands heard by their sub-sections. To increase or diminish the intensity of the fire, it is only necessary to pass down the line the words "rapid" "slow," "rapid" "magazine" "slow." The soldier being thoroughly habituated to these three rates *by instinctive habit* will change from one to the other as he is ordered, even if he can only just manage to hear the word of command. Each soldier must be likewise trained to pass down his sub-section any order he may hear given by his sub-section leader ; thus the transmission of orders in the pell-mell will be assured if only one or two men can hear them.

For purposes of Fire Discipline, therefore, it is necessary that every individual soldier be practised constantly in—

- (1). The pell-mell formation of new units ;
- (2). Controlled mass fire by these new units.

The pell-mell fight may often last for a very long time, and “controlled mass fire” is the only means by which the expenditure of ammunition and the rate of fire can be checked, that is to say, *the habit* of controlled mass fire.

To allow the soldier to use independent fire in the pell-mell is out of the question, for long before the decision is arrived at, his last cartridge would have been fired away. Independent fire should never be allowed for a minute, so long as a leader remains in the soldiers’ vicinity to control his fire.

Any soldier attempting to break into independent fire, or disregarding the ordered rate of fire, using “rapid” when “slow has been ordered, or “magazine” when “rapid” has been ordered, or firing at any target except the named one, should have his rifle at once knocked up by his sub-section leader. Smokeless powder will be found of great assistance in maintaining *order in the pell-mell*, for the leaders will have every man well under their eyes, and can see, and co-operate with each other. Every soldier must understand that he has got to help to maintain order if necessary ; obedience to orders will be enforced, if necessary, by the weapons of the leaders as long as any remain in the soldiers vicinity.

## 3.—FIGHTING ON BY HIMSELF.

We have, however not yet quite got to the bottom of the matter. There remains the case when the soldier will have to fight on without leaders. For this our Fire Discipline must also prepare the soldier, so that he may not be astounded and give way. Prince Kraft zu Hohenlohe Ingelfingen in his "Letters on Infantry," narrates a case which he saw: some infantry in front of his line of guns had successfully defended a wall against several attacks, when suddenly they gave way, and ran back to the shelter of his line of artillery; on asking them the cause, they replied "all our leaders were shot, and there was nobody left to tell us what to do." At critical moments in the pell-mell "the officer can only influence by his conduct and example." "At such moments the officer would sacrifice himself to set a good example. Hence arose the great loss in officers" (Von Bogoslawski). In 1870, three times as many officers fell as the proportion between officers and men. We need only look at the losses of the German Regiments in officers, killed and wounded, to realize this. A German Regiment (3 battalions) has roughly 68 officers, out of which at *Spicheren* the 48th regiment lost 25 officers; the 12th lost 35; the 39th regiment lost 27; the 74th regiment lost 36; the 77th lost 26. At *Wörth* the 47th lost 35 officers;

the 6th lost 30 officers; the 46th lost 35; the 37th lost 25; the 50th lost 32; the 87th lost 27; the 82nd lost 25; the 88th lost 22; the 95th lost 27; the 83rd lost 22. At Colombey the 43rd lost 32 officers; the 15th lost 29. At Vionville-Mars-la-Tour the 52nd lost 50 officers; the 20th lost 42; the 64th lost 41; the 72nd lost 36; the 16th lost 49. It is unnecessary to accumulate further instances, the great loss in officers is well-known. But if this was the case in 1870 when the officers were often partially hidden by smoke, will not the loss among officers in the pell-mell at close ranges be still greater in the future, when no smoke will hide the officer, but he will be a target for every hostile marksman, plainly visible.

It is clear therefore that often leaders will become scarce in the pell-mell, and that as at this period a leader's influence can only extend a short distance in his front, there must often be a portion of the line where all the leaders are down, and which is not within the sphere of influence of any of the remaining leaders.

For such cases we must prepare the soldier so, that when in the pell-mell he finds himself leaderless, and death all around him,—he may still fight on quietly, he and his comrades.

By the preparatory course of training mentioned

in Chapter II., he will already have acquired many of the qualities necessary.

- (1). He has been taught to, above all things, hit at the short ranges, and will have confidence in his ability to do so.
- (2). He will, from previous training in loose play, have acquired confidence in his bayonet, and in his ability to use it effectively if the enemy pushes a counter-attack home.
- (3). He will know why he is there, and what he has got to help to carry out.

There, therefore, remain only one or two more things to teach him, namely

- (1). *His duties when "fighting on by himself."*
- (2). *Practice in "fighting on by himself."*

### 1.—HIS DUTIES WHEN FIGHTING ON BY HIMSELF.

These duties every individual soldier, without exception, must be taught by theory, by practice and by constant questions, till he knows exactly what he has to do under such circumstances.

- (a). Lie perfectly still and fight quietly on.
- (b). That to attempt to retire is cowardly, and besides is much more dangerous than lying still and firing on where he is.
- (c). That, as he may have to stay there for a long time, he must husband his ammunition, or he will soon have none left.

- (d). That if the enemy makes a counter - attack, all he has to do is to lie still and fire steadily at his feet till he comes quite close, then jump up and go for him with the bayonet.
- (e). That he must obey the orders of the oldest soldier in his neighbourhood, and still keep to the ordered rates of fire, using "*slow*" in conjunction with his next comrade *as a rule*, "*rapid*" only when a good target appears, and "*magazine*" only to repulse a counter attack.
- (f). That if his ammunition is finished, he must try and get some more out of the pouches of wounded or dead comrades; that if he cannot get any more, all he has to do is—to fix his bayonet, lie perfectly still and wait; under no circumstances to retire.
- (g). That fresh troops and fresh leaders will soon come up, under whose orders he must place himself, and who will give him fresh ammunition.
- (h). That in the end, he will be able to get at the enemy with the bayonet, and carry out what he was sent forward to do.

We must constantly question the soldier about these duties when "fighting by himself."

Also we must see that he thoroughly understands all about "the fixed sight," when to fix



his bayonet, the effect of fixing his bayonet, and of not fixing his bayonet (*see* 68 Musketry Instruction Lee-Metford rifle and the accompanying diagrams). A similar diagram should be drawn showing him the lying down position firing at an enemy with "fixed sight;" for a long pell-mell infantry fight will be fought lying down, or kneeling in a ditch, or behind a wall or bank. This must be so; it is too much to ask of human nature that a man shall kneel down during the long pell-mell fight under the storm of magazine bullets,—especially when there are no leaders near him.

Only one thing now remains to be done, namely:—

## 2.—TO PRACTICE THE SOLDIER IN "FIGHTING ON BY HIMSELF."

This must be done constantly, both on the parade-ground and in the field. In company exercises, all officers, non-commissioned officers and even, perhaps, those "selected private soldiers," told off as secondary section and sub-section leaders, everybody who could possibly help him, to be fallen out well away in rear. A counter-attack to be then simulated by a marked enemy slowly advancing, and the soldier to resist it. Old soldiers to give the words in each sub-section "fixed sight," "slow fire," "fix bayonets," "rapid," "slow" and so on. The captain from close by will watch to see that

all is properly done, but will give no word of command.

This exercise should be repeated fairly often, so that each individual soldier may feel perfectly accustomed to it and know exactly what to do.

We have now got to the very bottom of the whole matter; deeper down than the soldier "fighting on by himself" it is impossible to go, nor can anything further be required of Fire Discipline under the utmost stress of modern battle. When Fire Discipline has trained the soldier so far, it has done its very uttermost to prepare him for battle.

Beyond this we must trust to the way the individual soldier's heart beats. Besides discipline, in battle, feeling plays a most important part. The fear of death and the instinct of self-preservation is overcome, not only by discipline, but also by the counter passions which despise death. It is overcome by the feelings of duty, patriotism, honour, pride of arms, esprit de corps. In our Fire Discipline, therefore, we must count upon these feelings of the individual soldier as most important allies, and seek to strengthen them by every means in our power. We must not avoid speaking about them because foolish people consider such things as "sentiment," but we must try and develop them as carefully as we do the qualities necessary for Fire Discipline. The more such feelings have

been developed in each individual soldier, the better will he fight in the pell-mell of battle; when every possible moral quality is required which can help him to bear himself bravely, and to come out victorious from the modern ordeal of fire.

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## CHAPTER IV.

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### SUMMARY.

The general principles, the foundation, the preparatory training, and the building up of Fire Discipline now stand out clearly, underneath the definitions and expected results which are given in the Infantry Drill.

We see that it is necessary first to study the infantry fighting of 1870, in order to get a clear idea of the pell-mell swarms of skirmishers which were, and must be, such a characteristic feature of the fight between breech-loaders. We then clearly see that to reduce these pell-mell swarms of skirmishers to order, is the task to be achieved: that *order in the pell-mell firing line engrained into the soldiers' blood, is Fire Discipline.*

If this then is Fire Discipline, it is manifest that, with what happens before the pell-mell, Fire Discipline has nothing to do. Nor does it pretend to have. So long as the soldier is under his old accustomed leaders, his old accustomed discipline should carry him through the fire, however hot.

When he becomes mixed up with other troops in the inevitable pell-mell, and comes under unaccustomed leaders, or, perhaps, no leaders at all, then, and not till then, Fire Discipline comes into play. Much confusion and error have been caused by the mixing up of discipline and Fire Discipline, to the prejudice of both ; to the prejudice of discipline, because the looser notions inseparable from Fire Discipline have got mixed up with it : to the prejudice of Fire Discipline, because its legitimate province, the pell-mell, has been ignored as being incompatible with discipline. It is desirable in the interests of both, that this confusion should cease, and a strong line be drawn between them.

Fire Discipline has nothing to do with the soldier so long as he is under his own accustomed leader. So long as the fire units can be kept distinct, discipline (the instant instinctive obedience of all the soldiers' muscles to the word of command), and good fire tactics, are all that is required. It is an insult to our discipline to suppose that it is not capable of carrying the soldier forward under fire, so long as he is under his own leaders, Our discipline ought to be able to give the order "shoulder arms when the troops are struck by heavy fire, with the certainty that it will be obeyed smartly (*i.e.* instinctively) by every man. If anybody objects that the Prussian discipline broke up before the Chassepot bullets in 1870, the answer

is that it did not break up until the units got mixed in the pell-mell: that it did not break up when the Fusilier Battalion of the 74th Regiment marched across 1,500 paces of open ground from the Ehrenthal to the Rotherberg, under a heavy fire, without returning a shot, or breaking their ranks.

But only *strict discipline* can accomplish feats like this. What we want now is to have our discipline *in the field* separated entirely from Fire Discipline, and tightened up, so that it may be able to stand alone. We want again the strict old fashioned discipline, the instinctive mechanical obedience to the word of command, either on the barrack square or on the field. The "voluntary-soldier-to-be-treated-kindly" idea is noxious, if it is to lead to a relaxation of discipline. Nor is it kindness, for a relaxation of discipline means disaster and death on a European battle-field, as the French found in 1870. Therefore let us have the old-fashioned discipline, and the same smartness and completeness of every motion be insisted on alike in the field and on the barrack square, always and everywhere. Let us have a discipline and a Fire Discipline, both perfect of their kind, and with two totally different provinces; discipline, so long as the units can be kept distinct; Fire Discipline when the units become mixed; Fire Discipline carefully keeping its apparent disorder away from

the province of discipline, from the unmixed units ; discipline conceding that the requisite time and attention be devoted to the province of Fire Discipline, the pell-mell of mixed units, and to the necessary preparatory training.

As regards the application of Fire Discipline in the field, we can see that somewhere about the "first parallel" the necessity for Fire Discipline will make itself felt. Somewhere about the "first parallel," on many parts of the battle-field, probably opposite those important points selected for assault, the pell-mell will begin to accumulate, as reinforcements come up in rear, and the fire grows hotter, while further ground cannot yet be gained owing to the enormous losses which any such attempt, before the enemy is shattered by fire, entails. We see that somewhere about the "first parallel" and onwards, we shall have to deal with a pell-mell mixture of the original first line and its reinforcements, with such mingled swarms as captured the Niederwald, Fröschwiller, the Bois St. Arnould, the farm of St. Hubert, &c. These confused mingled swarms may, in parts of the battle-field, be partly avoided by a judicious assignment of limited frontages and distribution in depth to each body of troops, but even then a pell-mell of the fire units of that particular body must ensue, for reinforcements can only be brought up in rear, other troops being on either flank. Even this limited pell-mell

may be difficult enough to manage. Opposite the important points selected for assault it may be necessary to pile battalion upon battalion, and, perhaps, even brigade upon brigade.

This pell-mell is not a pleasant thing to think of, but nevertheless it remains a fact, and a fact which we have got to face, and, as far as possible, to overcome. To overcome this disorder we must train the soldier now, each individual man without exception, in the strictest Fire Discipline till it becomes a second nature, till *order in the pell-mell firing line is engrained into the soldiers' blood.*

Then in the words of the Army Order 1st June, 1893 we shall have achieved "the main object,—to obtain at *the decisive moment the greatest development of infantry fire, under the most careful supervision and control.*

Having now carefully considered the cause, foundations, preparatory training, and application of Fire Discipline, the whole stands out so simple and clear, that it can be put into a few words, as follows :—

The task of Fire-Discipline is, in the pell-mell firing-line under the utmost stress of modern battle, still to achieve obedience and order. But at critical moments in the stress of the pell-mell, the soldier can only act *instinctively*. How then is obedience to be maintained. Manifestly only by making *obedience instinctive; by the strictest*



*discipline, till the very muscles of the soldier instinctively obey the word of command, both in the field and on the parade-ground, always and everywhere. We likewise require that he be trained, by constant practice in the pell-mell and controlled mass-fire, till he falls instinctively into new units out of the pell-mell, and instinctively alters his rate of fire according as he hears the orders, slow, rapid, magazine.*

Owing to the great loss of officers, in parts of the pell-mell, the soldier may be left leaderless, and must therefore be trained to "fight on by himself." We see that the requirements for such "fighting on by himself" are (1) confidence in his ability to hit at the short ranges and to use his bayonet effectively, (2) fighting intelligence developed, so that he shall know why he is there and what he has got to do, (3) constant instruction in his duties when "fighting on by himself," (4) constant practice in "fighting on by himself." Further than this we cannot go, but must seek to develop to the utmost those feelings which despise death, namely the feelings of duty, patriotism, honour, pride of arms, esprit de corps, of every individual soldier, and trust to these to carry him victoriously through the modern ordeal of fire.



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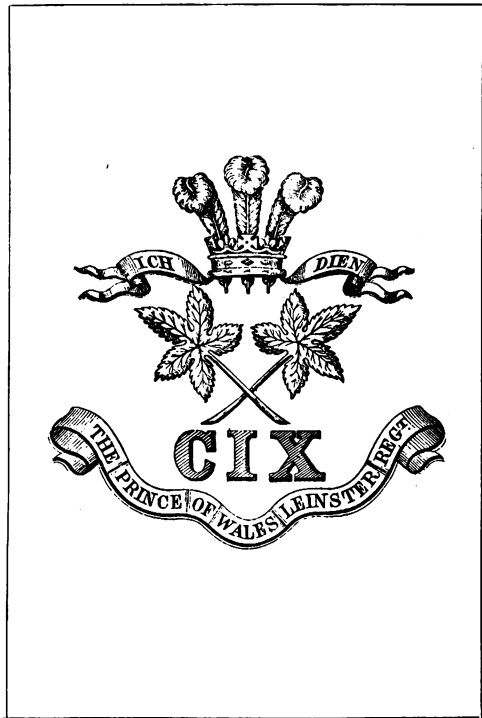


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